

Message Text

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SUBJ: PRESIDENT KEKKONEN'S NEW TERM AND THE FATE OF
THE COALITION GOVERNMENT.

1. PRESIDENT KEKKONEN YESTERDAY ANNOUNCED THAT HE WILL
TAKE THE TRADITIONAL OATH OF OFFICE BEFORE PARLIAMENT
WHEN HE STARTS THE EXTRA FOUR-YEAR EXTENSION OF HIS
PRESENT SIX-YEAR TERM ON MARCH 1, 1974. THIS MAY BE
A MOVE TO FURTHER "LEGITIMIZE" HIS STATUS FOR THE
SPECIAL TERM WHICH PARLIAMENT GRANTED HIM IN JANUARY 1973,
WHEN IT SET ASIDE THE CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENT THAT
THE PRESIDENT BE ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE. IT MAY ALSO
BE KEKKONEN'S WISH TO FOLLOW TRADITION AS MUCH AS POS-
SIBLE, OR AN ATTEMPT TO COUNTER INCREASING RUMORS THAT
HE WILL RETIRE BEFORE THE EXPIRATION OF THE FOUR-YEAR
TERM IN 1978. IN ANY CASE, THIS WILL HAPPEN
EITHER JUST BEFORE OR AFTER HE GOES FOR YET ANOTHER
UNOFFICIAL VISIT TO THE SOVIET UNION FOR DISCUS-
SIONS WITH THE SOVIET LEADERS.

2. TRADITIONALLY THE GOVERNMENT TENDERS ITS
RESIGNATION WHEN A FINNISH PRESIDENT STARTS A NEW
TERM. THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CENTER PARTY, FINANCE
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MINISTER JOHANNES VIROLAINEN, TODAY TOLD ME AT A

LUNCHEON I GAVE FOR HIM THAT IN THIS CASE THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT DO SO. VIROLAINEN SAID THAT THERE IS NOTHING IN THE CONSTITUTION REQUIRING THE PRESIDENT TO TAKE THIS OATH BEFORE PARLIAMENT, BUT THAT HE WAS OF COURSE FREE TO DO IT. VIOLAINEN ADDED THAT SHOULD KEKKONEN ASK THE GOVERNMENT TO RESIGN, IT WOULD OF COURSE DO SO, BUT CLAIMED THAT AT LEAST SO FAR KEKKONEN HAD NOT MADE SUCH A REQUEST. CENTER PARTY SECRETARY MIKKO IMMONEN AT THE SAME OCCASION SAID THAT AT LEAST THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT RESIGN BECAUSE OF KEKKONEN'S OATH TAKING, LEAVING OPEN THE POSSIBILITY THAT IT MIGHT FOR OTHER REASONS.

3. THERE IS OF COURSE ALWAYS THE CHANCE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL BREAK UP. AS TIME GOES BY, IT BECOMES MORE AND MORE LIKELY. PARTLY, THIS COALITION GOVERNMENT OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, CENTER PARTY, LIBERAL AND SWEDISH PEOPLE'S PARTIES, HAS BEEN IN OFFICE FOR MORE THAN FIFTEEN MONTHS, WELL OVER THE AVERAGE LIFE-SPAN OF FINNISH GOVERNMENTS, AND THE PARTNERS ARE BECOMING TIRED OF THE STRAIN OF CONTINUOUS COMPROMISING AND DEFENDING THEMSELVES TO THEIR OWN SUPPORTERS. PARTLY, THE CRITICAL INCOMES POLICY NEGOTIATIONS ARE AT A VIRTUAL STANDSTILL AT THE MOMENT, WITH FARMERS, LABOR, AND EMPLOYERS STILL MILES APART IN THEIR DEMANDS. PARTLY, THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT SOME OF THE INDIVIDUAL MINISTERS, PERHAPS FOREIGN MINISTER KARJALAINEN IN PARTICULAR, ARE CHAFING AT THE BIT IN THEIR PRESENT CIRCUMSCRIBED ROLES. ALL THIS APPEARS TO BE CONVERGING AROUND THE TIME THAT PRESIDENT KEKKONEN WILL START HIS NEW "TERM," RAISING SOME DOUBT ABOUT THE STAYING POWER OF THIS GOVERNMENT. IT CAN ALSO BE NOTED THAT THE "LIBERAL" WING OF THE COMMUNIT PARTY THROUGH CHAIRMAN SAARINEN HAS COME OUT IN FAVOR OF JOINING THE GOVERNMENT, BUT ONLY ON ITS TERMS, LEAVING EVERYONE FEELING THAT THIS IS NO MORE THAN A TACTICAL MANEUVER, BUT NOT TO BE DISCOUNTED COMPLETELY.

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4. THE MAIN POINT IN FAVOR OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT IS THE FACT THAT EVEN IF THE COMMUNISTS WERE TO BE INCLUDED, THERE IS NO VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO A GOVERNMENT BUILT ON A SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC-CENTER COALITION. A MINORITY GOVERNMENT, WHETHER OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRAT OR CENTER PARTY VARIETY, WOULD ONLY BE AN INTERIM SOLUTION. THEREFORE, WHAT WE MAY SEE IN THE NEAR FUTURE IS CHANGES IN PERSONALITIES

RATHER THAN PARTIES IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE GOVERNMENT, AND FEW CHANGES IN POLICY. IN THIS CONNECTION, WE HAVE LEARNED THAT PRESIDENT KEKKONEN WAS FURIOUS AT PRIME MINISTER KALEVI SORSA FOR RECENTLY COMPARING THE INCREASED PRICES OF SOVIET OIL WITH FINNISH WAR REPARATIONS TO THE SOVIET UNION WHEN DESCRIBING THE MAGNITUDE OF THE INCREASE IN TERMS OF PERCENTAGES OF GNP IN A SPEECH. KEKKONEN'S WRATH CERTAINLY DOES NOT ENHANCE SORSA'S POLITICAL STOCK OR FUTURE PROSPECTS. KREHBIEL

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